

## ICRC School Programme in Georgia

Excerpt from a focus group discussion with 10 schoolchildren who took part in the ICRC school programme (Tbilisi, autumn 2000):

**Question:** *Why is this course so important?*

**A boy:** *To avoid human suffering in wartime and render assistance to those who need it.*

**Question:** *Can you imagine finding yourself in a war situation?*

*Eight of the pupils think that they may well happen to find themselves in a war situation.*

**A girl:** *I've already been in such a situation.*

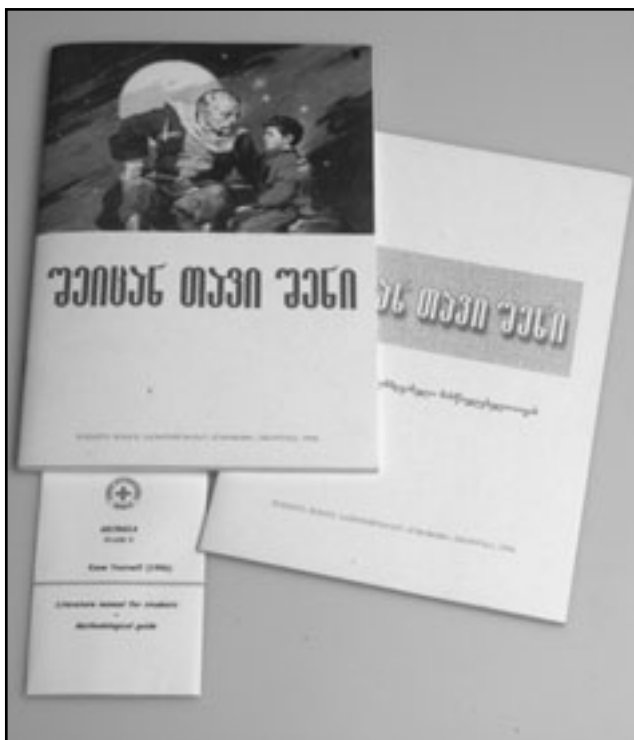
**A boy:** *I was in Gagra (Abkhazia) and saw people dying. I was deeply shocked.*

**Start:** 1995

### Course books

- *Know yourself* is a course book for the 6th grade and contains a selection of texts from Georgian literature (e.g. Ilya Chavchavadze, Nodar Dumbadze) illustrating humanitarian principles, such as compassion and respect for the dignity of others. *What hate destroys*, a 7th-grade course book, deals with basic rules of IHL and humanitarian principles. The books address pupils aged 11-13.

The compulsory literature lessons for grade 6 added to the teachers' workload, without extra payment. To lighten the teachers' burden and diversify content, for the 7th grade it was decided to divide the 18 course hours up among a variety of subjects, ranging from Georgian literature, history and geography (e.g. migration and refugees) to Russian and other foreign languages. Georgia is the only country where the school programme takes this multidisciplinary approach.



**Status:** at present compulsory

**Estimated number of pupils reached**

1996 - end of 2002/03 school year: 690,000

**Estimated number of teachers reached:**

50,000

**ICRC staff:** 2 national staff (including  
1 regional programme coordinator)

## Context

Since reaching independence in 1991 Georgia has experienced armed conflict with two of its regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The status of these breakaway regions is still unsettled and remains a source of tension, as well as an obstacle to economic improvement. In addition, there is tension between Georgia and Russia as a result of the situation in Chechnya.

Georgia, with its population of some 5.4 million, is a multi-ethnic State, with strong Armenian, Russian and Azeri minorities. Each linguistic community has its own schools where children can be educated in their native language. Despite its many natural resources, Georgia faces huge economic problems so that poverty has become

a way of life for large parts of the population. The situation in the isolated regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is even worse. Many school buildings are derelict and are occasionally closed in winter for lack of heating.

## Programme development

Between 1996 and 2000, the ICRC team together with experts from the Gogebashvili National Institute of Pedagogics, the Institute of teacher training of the Tbilisi city education department, the Central institute for teacher training and the Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani State pedagogical university prepared two course books for pupils in grades 6 and 7. After a test run, 147,000 copies were printed and distributed to Georgia's 3,000 schools. The 7th-grade course book was adapted and translated into Armenian, Azeri and Russian. This has allowed youngsters across Georgia, whatever their first language, to be included in the programme. In Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the programme uses the same 5th and 6th grade literature course books and teachers' guides as in the Russian Federation. Two compulsory lessons from the course book used in the Russian 9th grade have now been included in civic education classes in Abkhazia.

ICRC school programme Georgia			
Course books	Printed and distributed	No. books for pupils/ teachers	Reprint
grade 6 (age 12) <i>Know yourself</i>	<b>1996-1999</b>	77,000/ 5,000	Due in 2003/4
grade 7 (age 13) <i>What hate destroys</i>		70,000 5,000	
grade 7 (minority languages)	<b>2000</b>	14,600/ 1,200	due in 2006/7
Abkhazia 5th and 6th grades (ages 11 - 12)	<b>1998-1999</b>	6,000/ 350	2004/5 (Course books used: same as 6th Grade Russian Federation)
South Ossetia	<b>2002</b>	1600/	

## Teacher training: key to the success of the programme

Teacher training has been conducted in three stages: general information seminars; promotion of the programme among a specialized audience; in-depth training. Stages 1 and 2 (1996-2000) included over 160 seminars and lectures for some 1,200 teachers, including those teaching at minority language schools, and regional methodology experts specialized in literature and other subjects. The third stage began in 2001, after printing and distribution of the last batch of course books. To date (January 2003), some 600 teachers have been trained in five-day intensive courses, and 18 teacher trainers have been trained in 10-day trainers' courses. Training began in Tbilisi. In the course of 2001-2002 it was extended to the Kutaisi, Zugdidi and Batumi regions, where nine of the teacher trainers are now working. In 2003, training will be further extended to eastern and southern Georgia.

## Cooperation with the education authorities

The ICRC signed cooperation agreements with the Georgian Ministry of Education in 1995, 1998 and 2001. The Ministry of Education has made the course books compulsory in grades 6 and 7. Based on the 2001 agreement, IHL-related issues stand a good chance of being integrated in educational reform documents as part of the future compulsory curriculum. In addition, the ICRC cooperates with the regional education departments, which promote the distribution of books and organize seminars. At the level of teacher training, the ICRC is actively cooperating with two teacher training and methodology institutes in Tbilisi and one in Batumi.

## Promotional activities

- A 15-minute TV documentary on the ICRC school programme, shown several times on Georgian State TV
- "People and War": a travelling ICRC photo exhibition shown in cities across Georgia (1998)
- A countrywide essay-writing and painting competition for 7th-graders on the theme "People and War" (2000).



Question time - sixth-graders want to know the "whys" and "wherefores" during an IHL class in Tbilisi, Georgia

## Achievements, challenges and prospects

- Georgia's two frozen conflicts with the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain a constant source of tension, with occasional outbursts of violence in the case of Abkhazia. There remains a very real need to educate young people, many of whom are potentially future weapon bearers, about IHL.
- Georgia was the first country to make the school programme compulsory after the ICRC course books had gone through their initial test runs there. It is the only country where the ICRC programme is taught not only as part of literature or civics classes, but also as part of other subjects. The ICRC programme takes account of the regional differences by providing course books to the various communities in their own languages.
- Annual surveys conducted by the ICRC between 1996-99 regarding the use of the course books for grades 6 and 7, and an extensive evaluation in 2000 confirmed:
  - the school programme, in terms of content, presentation and methodology, enjoys the broad support of teachers, pupils, parents and the Ministry of Education. Some 80% of the teachers and pupils regularly use the ICRC-sponsored course books;
  - the overwhelming majority of pupils had understood the fundamental ideas contained in the course book; had grasped the relevance of the values underlying IHL;

were able to name some of the basic rights and obligations of combatants in times of war; and knew about the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement;

- pupils who have taken part in the programme know significantly more about IHL and understand humanitarian issues better than those who have not.
- The school programme in Georgia is in the second phase, where the emphasis is on teacher training. Fourteen ICRC-trained teachers are already working independently as teachers trainers in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Zugdidi and Batumi; by 2003 a network of teacher trainers can be expected to cover other regions.
- The cooperation agreement with the education authorities is coming up for renewal in 2004 and the course books for the 6th and 7th grade are nearing the end of their five-to-six-year life span. The Ministry of Education, engaged in a laborious process of educational reform, lacks the resources to take over the programme, of which reprinting the course books is the costliest part. However, the reform process could open up opportunities for IHL lessons to be included in official textbooks for civic education courses from the 1st grade (primary school) to the final school grade. Until such time, providing the course books will remain an essential part of the programme.

Determined to ensure the programme's continuation, the ICRC is looking for a partner to take over the financing of it for the next five years.

### **The ICRC is planning:**

#### **in 2003**

- 1 seminar for 11 regional coordinators who monitor the programme in schools; 45 refresher courses for small groups of teachers and for 5 groups of teacher trainers; 3 seminars for teachers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

#### **over the next five years**

- concentrate on teacher training and refresher courses with a view to improving the quality of teaching, letting the programme "sink in" and keeping teachers motivated
- closely follow the reform process with a view to seizing opportunities for IHL to be made part of civic education programmes.